LAZARSFELD, Paul (1941).

«Remarks on Administrative and Critical Communications Research»

Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, vol. 9, p. 2-16.

Remarks on Administrative and Critical Communications Research.

By Paul Felix Lazarsfeld.

During the last two decades the media of mass communication, notably radio, print and film, have become some of the best-known and best documented spheres of modern society. Careful studies have revealed the size of the audiences of all major radio programs and the composition of this audience in respect to sex, income, and a few other criteria. The circulations of newspapers and magazines are recorded by specially organized research outfits, and others report currently on which magazine stories and which advertisements are read week by week. Books, radio programs, and movies are tested as to the difficulty of the language they use and as to how adequate they are for the different educational levels of the population. The types of entertainment that different groups of people prefer are being investigated all the time, and many promotional campaigns are tested currently as to their success. A number of important new techniques have been developed in the course of all these research efforts. Modern sampling techniques, for instance, have made great progress because it has been realized that the practical value of a study would be lost if it were conducted among a group of people who are not representative of those sections of the population which the sponsoring agency wants to reach. Interviewing techniques have been greatly refined for similar reasons. The competitive character of much of this work has led to ever better methods of recording facts as to the extent of listening and reading. Where a subject matter doesn't lend itself to simple recording devices, great progress has been made in developing indices for complex attitudes and reactions.[1]

Behind the idea of such research is the notion that modern media of communication are tools handled by people or agencies for given purposes. The purpose may be to sell goods, or to raise the intellectual standards of the population, or to secure an understanding of governmental policies, but in all cases, to someone who

[1]For a general orientation in the field see Douglas Waples, *What Reading Does to People*, University of Chicago Press, 1940 and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Radio and the Printed Page*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940. For more current and specific information the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, published by the Princeton University Press, is the best source of articles and bibliography.

uses a medium for something, it is the task of research to make the tool better known, and thus to facilitate its use.

As a result, all communications research centers around a standard set of problems. Who are the people exposed to the different media? What are their specific preferences? What are the effects of different methods of presentation? One who uses media of communication is in competition with other agencies whose purposes are different, and thus research must also keep track of what is communicated by others. Finally, communications research has to be aware that the effect of radio, print, or the movie, does not end with the purposive use which is made of it by administrative agencies. If advertisers, for example, feel that radio is an especially powerful selling device, then printed media will receive less money, and research will have to see whether radio brings about a general deterioration of the reading habits of the population.

Studies of this kind are conducted partly by the major publishing organizations and radio networks and partly by academic agencies supported by universities or foundations.[1] Considerable thought has been given during the past years to clarifying the social and political implications of this new branch of social research. Its relationship to the present crisis is very interestingly discussed in a new study by Harold Lasswell.[2] One who has not participated in work of this kind can get a good picture of its atmosphere from a "fable" written by participants in the course of a series of discussions which took place during 1939 and 1940. We quote:

> "In the interests of concreteness, let us attempt to state the job of research in mass communication in a situation which, though purely hypothetical, serves to illustrate what that job involves.
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> "Let us suppose that government leaders and those responsible for mass communication are in agreement with respect to policy toward alien groups in this country. The public, they believe, should be made aware of the dangers of subversive activities on the part of aliens, but popular antipathy toward aliens in general should be minimized, and, above all, outbreaks of anti-alien sentiment should be avoided. The policy that the channels of mass communication must serve, then, becomes one of increasing public awareness of specific dangers of subversive action, while, at the same time, building tolerance toward aliens in general.

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[1]Among the universities, the University of Chicago Library School and the University of Minnesota Journalism School are especially active in the field of communications research. Organizations doing similar work with foundation funds are the Adult Education Association, the American Film Center, the Columbia University Office of Radio Research, the Library of Congress and the Princeton Public Opinion Research Project. In the magazine field, *Life* and *McCall's* are currently publishing valuable information. Material on radio can best be obtained through the research directors of the Columbia Broadcasting System and the National Broadcasting Company.

[2]Harold Lasswell, *Democracy Through Public Opinion.* George Banta Publishing Co. 1941.

"Suppose that some popular evening radio program, known to attract a considerable portion of the total listening audience, includes an address dealing with the dangers of subversive activities on the part of aliens. The explicit intention of the speaker, of his sponsors, and of the stations which carry the program is simply to further the policy outlined above by drawing attention to dangers to which the country should be alive. News dispatches of the next day or two, however, bring reports from various parts of the country of outbreaks of feeling against alien groups. Reports of local utterances in connection with these outbreaks carry allusions to the broadcast address of the evening. As a result, there is at least a strong suspicion that some connection exists between them and what was said on the evening broadcast.

"Suppose, too, that those responsible for the original address decide that they are likewise responsible for doing something to repair the damage which they quite innocently caused. This decision takes on new importance as the network involved receives from the Federal Communications Commission a request for the text of the address. Conscientious effort to repair the damage, it is clear, involves learning more of what the damage was. The comment it occasioned in the press makes clear that its effects were felt not through the radio alone, but through reports of the unfortunate address which the newspapers carried, in the local utterances which alluded to it, and even in some widely distributed newsreel reports of the local outbreaks that followed. What people then must be reached if the untoward effects of the broadcast are to be remedied?

"What were those effects and precisely what in the broadcast address provoked them? Clearly the broadcast was not alone responsible. Something in what was said evidently combined with the predispositions of the listeners and with the current circumstances—with the force of events, and probably with other widely disseminated communications—to set the stage for what ensued.

"Recognizing these questions as basic in any conscientious effort to repair the damage, those responsible set about to get them answered. Each station which carried the address is asked immediately to dispatch to network headquarters all the evidence that can be gathered on the attention it attracted in the area of the station's coverage—newspaper reports of the address itself, editorials and speeches referring to it, reports of the outbreaks that ensued, newsreel treatments of them, etc. Each station too, is asked to assign the best qualified members of its staff to interviewing listeners to determine as best they can what in the address led to the unanticipated outbreaks. Particularly are they urged to have their interviewers talk with individuals who took an active part in the outbreaks in question. Some of the stations, concerned to do their part, enlist the help of competent specialists from nearby universities to study more intensively the predispositions of individuals who were most aroused by the address, and to attempt to discover what other circumstances combined with the address to make them act as they did. The interviewing organization of one of the national polls is also brought into play to study similarly a cross-section of the country's population sure to comprise both listeners who were affected and not affected by the broadcast, and some as well whom it did not reach at all, directly or indirectly.

"As reports come in from all these inquiries, a new picture of the situation takes shape. To the surprise of the speaker, his sponsors, and the net-

work, what seemed innocent references to the few aliens believed to be engaged in subversive activities were taken by listeners to apply both to aliens generally and to hyphenates from countries thought hostile to American interests and traditions. Some of the individual interviews and the poll reports show an equally surprising attitude of general hostility toward these groups. Some of them specifically allude to what are taken to be racial traits of the group involved, others to specific individuals of the group who are in business competition with the informants. Still others mention seemingly authentic reports of Fifth Column activities in conquered European countries; and a considerable number refer to purported activities of this kind in the United States and in South America. Clearly, the stage was set on the evening of the broadcast for what actually happened both by the general psychological predisposition of listeners, and by the force of recent events.

"All this, of course, clearly contributed to the unusual attention this particular broadcast received—on the part of the radio audience, through the press dispatches which reported it, in the newsreels, and through the local utterances which ensued. Curiously too, the program in which the address was included on this particular evening had a larger audience than usual. Its rating on that evening, as reported by audience research agencies, jumped substantially from its customary level. To be sure, the inclusion of this particular address had been announced in advance, and by coincidence on this particular evening another popular program ordinarily broadcast at the same time, had gone off the air for the summer. This other program, it was generally assumed, appealed more to less educated listeners, with the apparent result that the audience for this address included, perhaps for the first time, more listeners of lower educational status—a supposition confirmed by a breakdown of audience research figures in terms of socio-economic status and by a check of the ratings of other programs broadcast at the same hour, none of which rose above their usual rating and some of which showed a marked decline.

"How to repair the damage done thus becomes more problematical than had at first appeared. Obviously, another address to counteract the one which had caused the damage would not be sufficient. Comparable announcements of it might of course again attract to the program much the same audience as the week before. But, it is pointed out, there is no reason to assume that the predispositions of listeners or the force of circumstances would again lead them to depart from their ordinary listening habits. Furthermore, there is no assurance, for much the same reasons, that a counteracting address would occasion equal attention in the press or in local utterances. Finally, the original speaker is undoubtedly now firmly identified, in the minds of listeners, with the views on alien and hyphenate groups attributed to him as a result of his earlier address. Would another address by him change that identification? What, then, can be done?

"In the face of this problem comes the suggestion that outside advice should be had. Unless this broadcast is to go down in record as the beginning of a destructive wave of feeling against all aliens and hyphenates and thus utterly defeat the interest which prompted it, any remedial measures have to be most carefully planned. Who is there who can contribute to a better understanding of what happened, and who to suggest what might be done by way of remedy?

"Suppose at this point help is sought from a social psychologist known to have been studying anti-minority feeling. When he is called in, it appears that he has for sometime been recording and analyzing whatever appears in the press, the radio, motion pictures, or in public utterances that seem to have a bearing on the subject. He points out that this is not an isolated episode, but rather, one more in a development which he had for some time been following. Just such anti-minority feeling had been developing in the country over a period of years. The growth of anti-Semitic sentiment in this country had been well recognized, and now the same feelings seemed to be shifting to other scapegoats.

"According to his analysis, the recent flow of mass communication had reflected this general trend. The term 'Fifth Column,' obscurely used in the Spanish Civil War, had had wide currency. In fact, the Allies had missed few opportunities to emphasize the concept, as, for example, in their use of Major Quisling's name. At the same time, reports of Fifth Column activities in the other conquered countries had been coming through, supported in still more recent times by revelations of similar activities in South America. Thus, strong pro-Ally feeling in this country, supported by the growing predisposition to fear and feel hostility toward minority groups, led to the over-generalization of the remarks made in the broadcast address.

"Such feelings, the specialist might go on to point out, would be less restrained among less educated and less self-conscious groups. Furthermore, these groups in his opinion would be less likely to respond to any intellectual appeal that might be devised to counteract the effect of the earlier talk. This, he advises, must be kept in mind as remedial measures are planned. In fact, he is in doubt as to what any single remedial effort can accomplish. Rather, since the talk in question was no isolated example, remedial effort must take into account all the other factors in current mass communication which tend, as he sees it, to arouse just such anti-minority feeling. To repair the damage, he points out, it is necessary to determine who must be reached, not only in terms of geographical coverage, but in psychological terms as well. His final advice at this stage is therefore to turn to another specialist who has studied both the geographical and psychological composition of the audience reached by various types of mass communication.

"This specialist, when called in, readily confirms from his own observations that the program on the night in question reached an audience psychologically different from that it usually attracted. To reach that audience necessitates in his opinion close attention to the listening, reading, movie-going habits of the part of the population affected by the original broadcast. He knows in general the characteristics of each of these audiences and the types of listening, reading, and films which ordinarily attract them. His studies, too, give him some basis for predicting how any given group will respond to a given type of program, though he would need to verify prediction by a careful check on the effects which resulted from the particular address in question. He also knows that the same message conveyed by different media, to reach the audience desired, would have to stress different aspects of the subject which are especially appropriate for the medium in question. If the counteracting measures planned are to be really remedial, he would strongly suggest some pre-testing of the responses which they actually evoke. He would propose, therefore, that any remedial measures should be tried out in advance on a relatively small but typical sample of the popula-

tion, and that a study of their responses be made as a basis for possible modifications before an attempt is made to reach any wider public.

"Thus, with the help of these and other specialists, the job begins. Agreed as it is that the possibility of unintended effects must be avoided, the advice of these specialists is followed. There is no need here to attempt to suggest the nature of what is done, but only to indicate how research in mass communication might contribute to the result. With the help of specialists in such research, the audience originally affected is redetermined. Types of radio programs, press releases, and newsreel treatments are worked out, calculated on the basis of the best evidence available to get a new hearing for the subject, adequate to counter the effects of the original address. Undoubtedly an explanation would be prepared for delivery by the original speaker, but other speakers would be enlisted whose position and identification in the public mind are likely to make their parts most widely influential. All materials prepared are pre-tested as had been suggested and at relatively slight expense—indeed, far less expense, proportionately, than merchandisers ordinarily incur in testing the market for new products. Conscientious effort having taken them so far, those responsible agree in wishing now to have some further test of the actual effects of what they have planned by way of remedy. Accordingly, arrangements are made in advance of their campaign to gauge its progress.

"A happy ending to this fable can probably take the form of a series of charts which subsequently ease the conscience of all concerned by showing, as their campaign proceeds, a consistent decline in all indices of overt hostility toward the groups against which outbreaks of feeling were directed.

"If the fable has a moral, too, that perhaps may come when all concerned, in the relief that follows in their success, philosophize a bit on their experience. The original speaker, the sponsors, and the broadcasters are still convinced of their initial innocence. But they are plagued a bit by certain recollections. One of them remembers, for example, suggesting extra publicity for the broadcast on the ground that the address to be included was particularly timely. Another recalls that the topic of the address was suggested by an acquaintance prominent in an organization which presumably on patriotic grounds had for some time been advocating stricter control of aliens in the country. In the end, their feeling is that however innocent their conscious purposes, they too, as Americans of their time, shared the same predispositions in planning the broadcast, and responded to the force of the same circumstances, as did the listeners to it. It is well, then, that conscious intention should be checked by more objective standards when instrumentalities are used so powerful in their influence as modern mass communication. Somehow the mere fact that they brought objective standards into play seemed to have sharpened their common sense and made them more wary for the future. If similar research had made them warier at the outset, need all this have happened? Need they have run the risk that the inevitable delays in repairing the damage they had caused made its complete repair impossible? Perhaps, they conclude, in media like radio where "instant rejoinder" is often difficult, more trouble should be taken to avoid mistakes like this.

"This fable, it is recognized, may seem to exaggerate the importance of research in mass communication. Ordinarily, to be sure, common sense, the high standards of the communications industries, and the controls of

legal and administrative regulation have appeared sufficient to assure the use of mass communication in the public interest. Ordinarily, wisdom in that use, it might appear, can be allowed to develop by trial and error and the resulting rules of thumb. A critical situation, like that supposed, admittedly throws into high relief considerations which, though always present, ordinarily seem less urgent. But crisis, as the derivation of the word implies, forces judgment; and a desired solution of the crisis necessitates that judgment shall not be mistaken. The critical situation of our fable, then, rather than exaggerating, perhaps only puts into perspective the consequences of mistaken use of mass communication and the help which research can give in avoiding such mistaken use."

Research of the kind described so far could well be called *administrative research*. It is carried through in the service of some kind of administrative agency of public or private character. Administrative research is subject to objections from two sides. On the one hand, there are the sponsors themselves, some of whom feel that they have not really got their money's worth. One good guess, so the argument goes, is of more practical importance than all the details which might be brought to light by an empirical study. There is, however, a fallacy behind this objection. Although speculation is indispensable for guidance in any kind of empirical work, if honestly carried through it will usually lead to a number of alternative conclusions which cannot all be true at the same time. Which one corresponds to the real situation can be decided only by empirical studies.[1] From another side comes an objection directed against the aims which prevail in the majority of current studies. They solve little problems, generally of a business character, when the same methods could be used to improve the life of the community if only they were applied to forward-looking projects related to the pressing economic and social problems of our time. Robert S. Lynd, in his *Knowledge for What*, has vigorously taken this point of view and has shown many ways whereby research could be made more vital.

Neither of these two arguments doubts that research can and should be done at the service of certain well-defined purposes. But at this point a third argument comes up. The objection is raised that

[1]There is a rather suggestive way to overcome the argument of the futility of empirical research. One might, for instance, tell such an opponent that according to studies which have been done people who make up their minds during a political campaign as to how to vote are influenced by very different factors than those who have more permanent political affiliations. The opponent will find that immediately understandable and will say that he could have come to this conclusion by using good common sense. It so happens that the opposite is true and that it is possible to predict to a high degree the vote of originally undecided people by means of the same characteristics which describe people with actual party affiliations. There are many other examples by which common sense first can be led to conclusions which then are proved by actual data to be incorrect.

one cannot pursue a single purpose and study the means of its realization isolated from the total historical situation in which such planning and studying goes on. Modern media of communication have become such complex instruments that wherever they are used they do much more to people than those who administer them mean them to do, and they may have a momentum of their own which leaves the administrative agencies much less choice than they believe they have. The idea of *critical research* is posed against the practice of administrative research, requiring that, prior and in addition to whatever special purpose is to be served, the general role of our media of communication in the present social system should be studied. The rest of these remarks are devoted to a formulation of this conception and to a short appraisal of its possible contributions to current communication research.

The idea of critical research has been developed in many studies by Max Horkheimer.[1] It seems to be distinguished from administrative research in two respects: it develops a theory of the prevailing social trends of our times, general trends which yet require consideration in any concrete research problem; and it seems to imply ideas of basic human values according to which all actual or desired effects should be appraised.

As to prevailing trends, everyone will agree that we live in a period of increasing centralization of ownership. Yet, although large economic organizations plan their production to the minutest detail, the distribution of their products is not planned systematically. Their success depends upon the outcome of a competition among a few large units which must rally sizeable proportions of the population as their customers. Thus promotion in every form becomes one of the main forces in contemporary society. The technique of manipulating large masses of people is developed in the business world and from there permeates our whole culture. In the end everything, be it good or bad, is promoted; we are living more and more in an "advertising culture." This whole trend is accentuated still more by the fact that it has to disguise itself. A salesman who has only one line to sell has to explain to each customer why this line suits just his individual purposes. The radio announcer who serves one national advertiser identifies himself to millions of listeners as "your" announcer.

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[1]Cf. especially "Traditional and Critical Theory" in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, VI (1937), pp. 245-295; "Philosophy and Critical Theory" pp. 625-631. The examples used here in presenting the idea of critical social research were taken from studies done by Dr. T. W. Adorno.

Such an analysis becomes an element of strong concern and solicitude if it is felt that these trends impair basic values in human life. The idea that our times are engulfed by a multitude of promotional patterns is coupled with the feeling that human beings, as a result, behave more and more like pawns upon a chessboard, losing the spontaneity and dignity which is the basic characteristic of the human personality. In order to understand clearly the idea of critical research, one must realize that it is being urged by men who have the idea ever present before them that what we need most is to do and think what we consider true and not to adjust ourselves to the seemingly inescapable.

The theory of a trend toward promotional culture leads to the conclusion that certain tendencies of our time jeopardize basic human values because people are kept from developing their own potentialities to the full. To be fit for the daily competition, we do not spend our leisure time developing a rich range of interests and abilities, but we use it, willingly or unwillingly, to reproduce our working capacity. Thus, not having acquired any criteria of our own, we succumb to and support a system of promotion in all areas of life, which, in turn, puts us in ever-increasing dependence upon such a system; it gives us more and more technical devices and takes away from us any valuable purposes for which they could be used.[1]

Thus the stage is set for the procedures of critical research. A critical student who analyzes modern media of communication will look at radio, motion pictures, the press, and will ask the following kinds of questions: How are these media organized and controlled? How, in their institutional set-up, is the trend toward centralization, standardization and promotional pressure expressed? In what form, however disguised, are they threatening human values? He will feel that the main task of research is to uncover the unintentional (for the most part) and often very subtle ways in which these media contribute to living habits and social attitudes that he considers deplorable.

What are the operations into which critical communication research could be broken down? The answer is not easy and a first attempt might be made by visualizing how a student would be trained

[1]It might help to clarify these ideas by comparing them briefly with other trends of thought, such as the consumer movement on the one hand and propaganda analysis on the other. The consumer movement is concerned with concrete wrongs in current advertising and might even denounce all advertising as economically wasteful. For the critical approach, business advertisement is only one of the many promotional forms by which present society is maintained and its cultural rather than its economic implications are discussed. A similar difference appears in comparison with propaganda analysis. The problem is not that people are misled in regard to certain isolated facts, but that they have less and less opportunity to develop standards of judgment of their own because wherever they turn they are caught by some kind of promotion.

to make observations in everyday life and to try to interpret them in terms of their social meaning. You sit in a movie and look at an old newsreel showing fashions of ten years ago. Many people laugh. Why do those things which we admired just a little while ago seem so ridiculous now? Could it be that we avenge ourselves for having submitted to them under general pressure, and now that the pressure in favor of these particular styles has been lifted, we compensate by deriding the idols of yesteryear? At the same time, we submit to the style-promotion of today only to laugh at it a few years from now. Could it be that by laughing at past submission, we gather strength to submit to the present pressure upon us? Thus, what looks to an ordinary observer like an incident in a movie theater, becomes, from this point of view, a symptom of great social significance.

Or you find that a large brewery advertises its beer by showing a man disgustedly throwing aside a newspaper full of European war horrors while the caption says that in times like these the only place to find peace, strength, and courage is at your own fireside drinking beer. What will be the result if symbols referring to such basic human wants as that for peace become falsified into expressions of private comfort and are rendered habitual to millions of magazine readers as merchandising slogans? Why should people settle their social problems by action and sacrifice if they can serve the same ends by drinking a new brand of beer? To the casual observer the advertisement is nothing but a more or less clever sales trick. From the aspect of a more critical analysis, it becomes a dangerous sign of what a promotional culture might end up with.

A next step in trying to explain this approach could be taken by applying it not only to an observation of daily life, but to problems we meet in textbooks current in the social sciences. A text on the family, for example, would not be likely to contain a detailed analysis showing how one of the functions of the family in our society might be that of maintaining the authoritarian structure necessary for our present economic system, that the predominant position of the father might prepare the child to accept the privations he will suffer as an adult, and to do so without questioning their necessity. Applying this to a study of the family in the depression we might depart from the traditional question of what changes the depression has brought about in family life. Couldn't it be that the family has influenced the depression? Interesting research problems would come up: what was the effect of different family constellations upon people's ability to find out-of-the-way jobs, to use initiative in organizations of unemployed, and so on?

Another example could arise from a well-known observation which can be found in every text on social psychology, to the effect that the way we look at the world and react to the problems of the day is determined by our previous experience. The notion of experience is taken as a psychological concept which does not need much further elucidation. But could it not be that what we call "experience" undergoes historical changes? Visualize what experience meant for a man who lived in a rather stable, small community, reading in his newspaper elaborate accounts of events he considered news because they happened a few weeks before, spending many an hour walking through the countryside, experiencing nature as something eternally changeless, and as so rich that years were needed to observe all its details. Today we live in an environment where skyscrapers shoot up and elevateds disappear overnight; where news comes like shock every few hours; where continually new news programs keep us from ever finding out the details of previous news; and where nature is something we drive past in our car, perceiving a few quickly changing flashes which turn the majesty of a mountain range into the impression of a motion picture. Might it not be that we do not build up experiences the way it was possible to do decades ago, and if so wouldn't that have bearing upon all our educational efforts? Studies of smaller American communities have shown that since the turn of the century there has been a steady decrease of efforts in adult education of the old style. Now radio with its Professor Quiz program brings up new forms of mass education which, in their differences from the old reading and discussion circles, show a striking parallel to the development sketched here.[1]

Omitting a number of details and specifications, the "operation" basic to this approach consists of four steps.

a) A theory about the prevailing trends toward a "promotional culture" is introduced on the basis of general observations. Although efforts are steadily being made to refine and corroborate this theory it is taken for granted prior to any special study.

b) A special study of any phenomenon consists in determining how it expresses these prevailing trends (introduced in (a)) and in turn contributes to reinforcing them.

c) The consequences of (b) in stamping human personalities in a modern, industrial society are brought to the foreground

[1] cf. W. Benjamin's study on Baudelaire in this periodical, Vol. VIII (1939-40), p. 50 ff.

and scrutinized from the viewpoint of more or less explicit ideas of what endangers and what preserves the dignity, freedom and cultural values of human beings.

d) Remedial possibilities, if any, are considered.

Before we turn to the value which such an approach can have for the specific field of communications research, it is first necessary to meet an objection to the idea of critical research which may be raised against it on its own ground, to wit, that so much of its effort is spent on what might be called "showing up" things, rather than on fact-finding or constructive suggestions. It must be admitted that being constructive is a rather relative concept, and that the question of what are relevant facts cannot be decided only according to established procedures. The situation is somewhat similar to the wave of criticism which started with the reports of the Royal Commission in the British Parliament and with the English social literature of the Dickens type in the first half of the last century. Then, the task was to discover and to denounce the material cruelties of the new industrial system: child labor, slum conditions, and so on. Not that all these horrors have now been eliminated, but at least there is enough public consciousness of them so that whenever a student finds similar conditions, for instance among migrant workers or sharecroppers, some steps toward improvement are taken. The trend of public opinion and public administration is toward better social conditions. In cultural matters, a similar development has not yet taken place. The examples given above will be taken by many readers as rather insignificant in a field which is not of great practical importance. It might very well be, however, that we are all so busy finding our place in society according to established standards of success that nothing is more important at this moment than to remind ourselves of basic cultural values which are violated, just as it was of decisive historic importance a hundred years ago to remind the English middle classes that they were overlooking the sacrifices which the new strata of industrial laborers underwent when the modern industrial world was built. As Waller has pointed out,[1] the moral standards of tomorrow are due to the extreme sensitiveness of a small group of intellectual leaders of today. A few decades ago the artist who was destined to be the classic of the succeeding generation was left to starve in his own time. Today we are very eager not to overlook any growing talent, and we have fellowships and many other institutions which try to assist the growth of any seed of artistic

[1] *The Family*, Dryden Press, 1931.

development. Why should we not learn also to be more hospitable to criticism and find forms in which more patience can be exercised to wait and, in the end, to see what is constructive and what is not.[1]

And now for the specific contributions which the idea of critical research can make to the student who is engaged in the administrative research side of the problem. As long as there is so little experience in the actual cooperation of critical and administrative research, it is very difficult to be concrete. One way to put it is to point to the strong intellectual stimulation which derives from such joint efforts. There will be hardly a student in empirical research who does not sometimes feel a certain regret or impatience about the vast distance between problems of sampling and probable errors on the one hand, and the significant social problems of our times on the other. Some have hit upon the solution of making their social interests their private avocation, and keeping that separate from their research procedures, hoping that one day in the future the two will again merge. If it were possible in the terms of critical research to formulate an actual research operation which could be integrated with empirical work, the people involved, the problems treated and, in the end, the actual utility of the work would greatly profit.

Such a vitalization of research might well occur in a variety of forms which can only be exemplified and not stated in a systematic way. Quite likely, for instance, more attention will be given to problems of control. If we study the effects of communication, however fine methods we use, we will be able to study only the effects of radio programs or printed material that is actually being distributed. Critical research will be especially interested in such material as never gets access to the channels of mass communication: What ideas and what forms are killed before they ever reach the general public, whether because they would not be interesting enough for large groups, or because they would not pay sufficient returns on the necessary investment, or because no traditional forms of presentation are available?

Once a program is on the air or a magazine is printed, critical research is likely to look at the content in an original way. A num-

[1] It is quite possible that the radio industry could lead in releasing some of the pressure which, at this time, keeps much social research in conventional forms and cuts it off from expanding into new fields. Already, in the field of politics, the radio industry has proved itself more neutral and more balanced than any other large business institution. The necessity of keeping in touch with the large masses of the population might also make them more amenable to trying methods of research even if, at first, they seem less innocuous. An honest analysis of program contents and program policies might be the first testing ground.

ber of examples are available in the field of musical programs.[1] Serious music on the radio is not unconditionally accepted as good. The promotion of special conductors, which exaggerates the existing differences and detracts from attention to more important aspects of music, is pointed to as another intrusion of an advertising mentality into an educational sphere. The ceaseless repetition of a comparatively small number of recognized "master works" is derived from the necessity to keep public service programs more in line with commercial fare of the radio. From such an analysis concrete suggestions evolve as to how music programs on the radio should be conducted to make them really serve a more widespread music appreciation. A discussion of the social significance and the probable effect of popular music, to which almost 50 per cent of all radio time is given, is also available and so far represents the most elaborate analysis of a type of mass communication from the point of view of critical social research.[2] Similar studies of printed matter can be made. For instance, what is the significance of the great vogue of biographies during the last decade? A study of their content shows that they all talk in terms of sweeping laws of society, or mankind or the human soul to which every individual is submitted and at the same time point up the unique greatness and importance of the one hero they are treating.[3] The success of this kind of literature among middle class readers is taken as an indication that many of them have lost their bearings in regard to their social problems. These biographies reflect a feeling that we are swept by waves of events over which the ordinary human being has no control and which call for leadership by people with super-human abilities. By such analysis anti-democratic implications are carved out in a literary phenomenon which otherwise would not attract the attention of the social scientist.

On the other end, upon studying the actual effects of communications, larger vistas are opened to someone whose observations are influenced by the critical attitude here discussed. To give only one example: We praise the contribution which radio makes by enlarging so greatly the world of each single individual, and undoubtedly the praise is deserved. But is the matter quite so simple? A farmer might be very well equipped to handle all the problems which his

[1]See T. W. Adorno, "On a Social Critique of Radio Music," on file at the Office of Radio Research, Columbia University.

[2]See T. W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," in this issue.

[3]Such an analysis has been carried through by L. Lowenthal of the Institute of Social Research and is now being extended to the many biographies which are currently appearing in American magazines with mass circulation.

environment brings up, able to distinguish what makes sense and what doesn't, what he should look out for and what is unimportant. Now the radio brings in a new world with new problems which don't necessarily grow out of the listener's own life. This world has a character of magic, where things happen and are invisible at the same time; many listeners have no experience of their own which would help them to appraise it. We know that that sometimes has very disturbing effects, as witnessed by the attitude of women listeners to daytime serials,[1] by the attitude of millions of letter writers who try to interfere with the world of radio without really believing that their efforts will make any difference. It certainly should be worthwhile not to stop at such incidental observations but to see whether people's attitudes toward reality are not more profoundly changed by radio than we usually find with more superficial observations of their daily habits.

Columbia University's Office of Radio Research has cooperated in this issue of *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* because it was felt that only a very catholic conception of the task of research can lead to valuable results. If there is any general rule of thumb in intellectual work it should be the advice never to pass over criticism without exhausting all the constructive possibilities which might be implied in another person's point of view. The present remarks were written for the purpose of clarifying some of the difficulties which were experienced in actually formulating what critical social research consists in and seeing its best place in a scheme of general integration of all efforts. The writer, whose interests and occupational duties are in the field of administrative research, wanted to express his conviction that there is here a type of approach which, if it were included in the general stream of communications research, could contribute much in terms of challenging problems and new concepts useful in the interpretation of known, and in the search for new, data.

[1]See the paper of Herta Herzog in this issue.